



HUMANE LEAGUE
OF LANCASTER COUNTY

Building a Relationship With Your Dog: A Manners Program

(Portions of this handout were adapted from "Leading the Dance" by Sue Ailsby)

"Nothing in Life is Free" (NILIF) is a program that provides your dog with structure, security, and leadership. Dogs crave structure and routine in their lives and do best with a clear idea of where fit in their "pack." It's up to us as their human "leaders" to provide them with a safe home and the knowledge that their needs will be cared for. Old-style dog training puts forth the idea that you must be the "alpha" wolf by ruling your dog aggressively with an iron fist. The problem is, the theories of wolf behavior behind this idea are outdated and flawed, and biologists and ethologists have a much better understanding of wolves today that dispute these notions. In truth, the lead wolf in a pack is a confident animal that exerts influence through control over resources (i.e. food, mates, desirable sleeping places). A lead wolf is NOT the most aggressive or threatening member of the pack. A wolf who leads by fear and intimidation and aggression would most likely be deposed by the rest of the pack in favor of a leader who can ensure the pack's long-term survival. More importantly for you as a pet owner, dogs, while descended from wolves, *are not wolves*. It is incorrect to use a model of a wild animal's behavior, no matter how closely related to their domestic cousins, for how you should live your daily life with your dog.

In "real life" terms for dog owners, this means that you want to be a confident, calm, charismatic leader to your dog, and you do this by controlling access to all the things in life your dog wants (food, toys, play, sleeping areas, walks, etc.) We recommend following the NILIF Manners Program throughout your dog's life. Giving your dog everything he wants "for free" can lead to making him anxious and confused over your role as leader and his role in life, or it can lead to aggression problems. You do not have to do every step in this program for it to be effective, but be consistent with the ones you do. If you only follow a few, the feeding regimen, handling, and the exercise/play are the most important. After a few weeks (about 6-8), you can slowly start to add in privileges if everything is going smoothly with your dog.

1. Umbilical Cord - Tie the dog to you with a leash when you are home and ignore him as you go about your business. You can do this for a short time or longer, once a week or more, whatever you feel comfortable with. If the dog

has to follow you around and watch you, it will help him to both bond to you, and see you as very important.

2. Attention - Two times a day or more, ask the dog to do the “watch me” command in exchange for something he wants. Simply hold a treat up to your dog’s eyes and then pull it toward the middle of your face, between your eyes. When the dog gives you eye contact, say “Yes!” in an excited voice and give them the treat. Gradually add in a command such as “watch me” or you could even use the dog’s name.

3. Obedience - Ask your dog to “sit” for you before you feed them a meal, give them a treat, or give them any attention or anything in life he wants. In other words, if your dog comes up to you while you are sitting on the couch watching TV and starts to nudge your hand for attention, ask him to “sit” first. Once he sits, then you can pet him. Allowing the dog to get attention whenever he wants without working for it can result in a very pushy, insecure dog. Do not pet, stroke or cuddle with your dog for “free.” Always ask your dog to “sit” first. You can also vary the behaviors so that your dog never knows if you will ask for a “sit” or a “down” or a “watch me” or a trick like shake or roll over or spin.

4. Play Time - If you play with your dog with a toy, ask your dog to sit before you throw the ball or start playing. Do this each time you throw the ball or initiate play. If your dog refuses to sit, ignore him for 5 full minutes, and then start again. Always set the rules for play. It is acceptable to play tug of war, but the dog must know that you start and stop the game and that you are always in control. Remember when playing any games that you must always determine the rules of the game, how they are played, and when they begin and end. Try to end games while your dog is still excited and into the game, rather than when he gets tired and bored.

5. Handling - At least once a day, handle the dog. If he starts to fuss or squirm, move slowly and gently and gradually work up to handling him all over. You can give the dog treats while handling his feet, his ears, his paws, his tail, etc, or you can praise him while you do this. You want the dog to not only know that you can handle him anytime you want, but that being handled is a positive, pleasant experience. Use gentle, even, massaging strokes, and don’t apply too much pressure.

6. More Obedience - Try to get your dog to do a long down stay at least once a day. A good way to do this is while you are watching TV - sit on the couch, put the dog in a down at your feet, put your foot on the leash, give the dog a bone

or a chew toy to occupy his attention, and proceed with the down stay. You can also practice stays in the kitchen while you are cooking dinner, or while you are talking on the phone, or while you are working on your computer at night. Try incorporating obedience commands into your daily routine, which makes it easier for you to find the time to train the dog, and makes it easier for your dog to understand what sort of behaviors are expected of him during normal daily situations.

7. Sleeping on the Bed - If you allow your dog to sleep on the bed, you want the dog to feel that sleeping on the bed with you is a privilege, not a right, and that he can only do so when invited onto the bed by you. Practice on-leash asking the dog to get off the bed, and then invite him back on, and then off, and so on. If you have a particularly demanding or pushy dog, it is a good idea to *not* have them sleep on the bed with you.

8. Furniture - Do not allow your dog to jump up on the furniture without permission. If you are willing to let your dog sit on your couch, only let them do so when you invite them to. Do not allow them to sit on the couch if you or your children are sitting on the floor. If the dog is sitting above you or your family, he may not see you as a good leader. If the dog is already sitting on the couch when you come into the room, simply ask him to get off, praise him, and then direct him to get back up.

9. Ignoring Your Commands - If you ask your dog to do something and he does not comply, ignore him for the next 5-10 minutes. Do not even look at him. For example, if your dog jumps on you and you ask the dog to sit and it continues to jump, turn your back on the dog, fold your arms, ignore him, and walk away. When you turn your back on your dog, most likely he will attempt to come around to your front - if he does this, continue to turn your body so that your back is to the dog (and don't get dizzy!). If he sits, praise him enthusiastically. Remember that consistency is very important. If you ask the dog to sit and he does not, and you get frustrated and give him a treat, or give him something he wants (such as being let outside the house or to get dinner, etc.), he will learn he does not always have to comply when you ask him to do something. It's better in the long run to take the time to wait him out and be patient until he complies.

10. Tell the Dog What You WANT Him to Do - Tell your dog what you want him to do, instead of just yelling "No." If a dog is doing something you don't like, such as jumping up, ask them to do something else like "sit." When you praise your dog when he sits, he will know that he is being praised for the sit and not for jumping up. Remember that dogs are a lot like small children—it's

not enough to stop them from doing an inappropriate action, you need to guide them to what is appropriate and reinforce them for it. Behavior abhors a vacuum, and if you do not redirect the dog to a behavior you want, he will think up another behavior to fill the gap and this behavior may be equally inappropriate!

11. Feeding - Feed your dog twice a day (or three times for puppies) and ask him to sit before you put the bowl down. If your dog does not eat within 10-15 minutes, pick up the food bowl and say nothing. Don't worry if your dog does not eat, a healthy dog can miss a meal or two with no repercussions. Your dog will learn that all good things in life (namely, food!) come from you. A dog that is free-fed cannot make this association. With particularly "pushy" dogs, another excellent method is to hand feed them all of their dinner, so that they learn that every morsel of food they get comes from you. If your dog eats but doesn't finish the bowl, give him half the amount next time so that he finishes everything.

12. Exercise/Play - Play and/or exercise your dog every day! Many behavioral problems in dogs are often a result of lack of exercise. Many breeds, particularly herding and sporting breeds, were created to run and work all day long, and a short 10-20 minute walk twice a day is not enough for them. Moreover, it is a misconception that a large yard will give a dog exercise. Dogs left alone in the yard all day can exhibit boredom through digging, jumping, barking, and other undesirable activities. Adding more exercise to the dog's daily regimen can clear up these issues many times without any other type of intervention. Walking your dog for 30 minutes or more twice a day is great exercise for your dog (and you as well!) Play sessions with other dogs are also a good way for a dog to burn off energy. If you have friends or neighbors with dogs who are well-behaved around other dogs, set up "play dates." You can also make use of "doggie day care." Another great form of exercise is fetch - many dogs love chasing after balls, and you can easily take a tennis racket in your back yard and hit some balls for your dog to chase. Remember, "A tired dog is a good dog!"

Other Ideas for Management

Management is a term trainers use to describe methods of controlling a dog's environment to prevent behavioral problems. Sometimes it is easier and more effective to provide obstacles for a certain behavior than changing the behavior itself. Because dogs learn behaviors through practice and repetition, eliminating their ability to practice inappropriate behaviors is one major facet

of extinguishing the behavior. Below are some ideas for management that every dog owner should consider:

Crates: Having a crate-trained dog is a wonderful thing! It allows your dog to have a safe place (i.e. a “den”) where he or she can hang out while you are too busy to attend to him, and you as his owner do not need to worry about things like inappropriate elimination and chewing and destructiveness to non-doggie approved objects. Crates should not be used as a long-term solution - you would not want to keep your adult dog crated for more than 5-6 hours (less for puppies). However they can be an incredibly effective tool in housetraining the dog, as well as a place to confine your dog at times you cannot be supervising him. You can also use baby-gates in a room such as a kitchen or a laundry room to achieve the same idea. Always make the dog’s crate a pleasant place to be by leaving blankets, towels, or bedding that smell like you, and leave the dog with a chew toy or bone to work on while he is confined.

Mental Stimulation: Dogs need to exercise their minds as well as their bodies. There are many toys on the market that fulfill this need. Kongs, Buster Cubes, Havaballs, and other toys that you fill with food give dogs the opportunity to figure out how to get the food out of the toy. Another idea is to simply scatter your dog’s kibble in your yard and let him “hunt” for his food. If your dog likes water, you can give him a “kiddie pool” so that your dog can splash around in it. You can throw some of your dog’s favorite toys in the pool so that he can chase after them. Dogs that enjoy digging, particularly members of the Terrier group, enjoy having a sandbox or an area of your yard that you have set aside for the dog to dig in. You can bury toys and treats and give your dog the opportunity to find them. Remember, don’t let your dog find ways to amuse himself; provide the dog with ways to play that are acceptable to you and your belongings.

If you have questions about your new pet, please contact the Humane League for information and advice. We are always here to help! You can also email your questions about behavioral problems to behaviorhelp@humaneleague.com or go to our web site to our “resources” page with many helpful handouts on common behavior problems.

The Humane League of Lancaster County
2195 Lincoln Highway East
Lancaster, PA 17602
717-393-6551